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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#)
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: ITALY PLEDGING FORCES BEFORE NATO
MEETING; EXPECT DIRECT CONSULTATIONS

REF: ROME 1318

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Elizabeth Dibble for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) Following up on reftel conversation, Foreign Minister Franco Frattini contacted the Ambassador the evening of December 2 to inform him that the GOI was changing its approach on announcing its new force contributions. Following Tuesday afternoon conversations between the Foreign Minister, Prime Minister Berlusconi, and Defense Minister LaRussa, Frattini said that Italy planned to announce its new troop commitments - approximately 1,000 over its current 2,900 standing commitment - shortly before the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels. Contrary to their previous thinking, in order to make the most powerful endorsement possible of President Obama's message, GOI officials will make the announcement first and consult with Parliament afterwards.

¶2. (C/NF) Frattini raised pointedly that he understood that the US was conducting high-level, face-to-face consultations with the UK and France to discuss modalities of the increase and that Italy - because of its major new increase on top of its sustained commitment to the ISAF mission - needed to be part of the core group that participated in those discussions. (note: Frattini did not indicate the basis for his belief that there were separate US/UK/France consultations planned).

¶3. (C/NF) Comment: By increasing its ISAF forces by almost 50%, the Berlusconi government is sticking its neck way out to deliver on its promise to fully back the President's new approach in Afghanistan. Berlusconi's coalition partners have already told him - and us - that they plan to try to extract major political concessions that the Prime Minister has been loathe to make as their price for cooperating on a troop build up. Moreover, opposition to the boost by Italy's powerful minister of finance is, we understand, guaranteed. By leapfrogging consultations with the parliament to deliver a strong early message buttressing the President's Dec. 1 address, the Prime Minister is assuming additional political risk here. End Comment.

¶4. (C/NF) Post Recommendation: For Berlusconi, Frattini, and LaRussa to persuade parliament and the Italian people that Italy needs to commit these new forces while other key European nations equivocate, or, in some cases, decline to proffer additional resources, they need to feel and to be able to show that they are in the most inner circle deliberating with the United States. FM Frattini and DefMin La Russa have blanketed the airwaves with messages of robust support ahead of and since the President's address at West

Point. They will now need to pivot quickly to building parliamentary backing for the augmentation. Their task will be made easier against the backdrop of high-level USG consultation with Italy.

15. (C/NF) Embassy strongly recommends that we give Italy an opportunity to demonstrate to the Italian public that the U.S. recognizes and values that the GOI has dug very deep to make a substantial new investment, despite eroding public support here for the ISAF effort. If the Secretary's schedule in Brussels this week does not permit a substantive exchange with FM Frattini, Embassy recommends an early invitation to Washington for quick consultations.

THORNE